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CAPERNAUM, CHRIST'S "OWN CITY."

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WE are to visit that portion of the north shore of the Sea of Galilee which lies between the mouth of the Jordan and the upper end of the plain of Gennesaret. In its present condition this region has very little to commend it to our notice; but historically it deserves our undivided and reverent attention, because it is intimately connected with the life of Christ and the beginnings of the Christian religion.

This shore has no bluffs, there are no high hills near it, the ascent inland that is to the north is gradual, but it is remarkable from the fact that the entire surface is broken and covered thickly with basalt boulders. In this respect there is hardly another section of Palestine to be compared with it, since these boulders for three or more miles back from the water and along northward near the Jordan are so thick that it is next to impossible for animals to pass over them. "Fields" do not exist and never have existed here, and "the cultivation of the soil" is impossible except in a very limited degree. Along the shore, close to the water's edge, there are a few patches of fertile land, but whatever towns existed here must have been supported chiefly by the sea traffic and its fisheries rather than by the products of the soil.

Considering *Khan Minyeh*, or *Minia* as it is now sometimes called, as the north end of the plain of Gennesaret, the distance thence to the mouth of the Jordan is a little less than five miles, scarcely more than four and a half miles. The direction of this section of the coast is slightly northeast and southwest, the exact bearings of the mouth of the Jordan from *Khan Minyeh* being E. 23 degrees north, so that one would be practically correct to say that the line of the coast ran east and west. At

Khan Minyeh there is a ruined *khan*, whence its name; also a small mound, hardly noticeable, called *Khurbet Minyeh*, the Fountain of the Fig, or *Ain et Tin*; a curiously shaped hill which is artificial, called *Khurbet el Oreimeh*, and an old aqueduct in the face of the rock. We cross a fertile bit of land and reach in twenty minutes *Et Tabighah*, a copious spring or group of springs with mills. Two miles further over countless bowlders we reach a ruin called *Tell Hûm*, and two miles further brings us to the mouth of the Jordan. Not far from the latter point we passed *Wely Ibrahim*, one of the many similar tombs that are scattered at intervals over the country. Two miles north of *Tell Hûm*, in a wilderness of bowlders, is a ruin called *Kerazeh*, now accepted as the site of Chorazin. One might easily suppose that this place was built here for purposes of defense, a fact which was true of many towns east of the Jordan in the *Lejah*, the great lava bed of Bashan. They were built away from the free land of the plain, in localities that were practically inaccessible, roads being cut through the rocks for an outlet, and in this manner far greater security was assured, since the places could more easily be defended.

If we are to locate Capernaum, every ruin in this angle between the river and the lake must be noticed; every road, if there are remains of any; also the character and possibilities of the soil of the region, since every physical feature as well as every indication of human activity may have a bearing on the question.

In discussing the site of Capernaum it is the invariable rule to appeal to the testimony of Josephus, and to that rule we must conform, although, after repeated attempts to get definite help from his words, we conclude that his testimony, in this case at least, is really of little value. In *Wars*, iii, 10:8, where he is giving his brilliant description of the plain of Gennesaret, he says that "it is irrigated by a highly fertilizing spring called Capharnaum by the people of the country." This evidently was a local name of a spring which he simply adopts. He does not apply it to a town; in fact, in this connection he does not speak of any town. It is pure supposition to consider this spring and

the Capernaum of the New Testament as having any connection; certainly Josephus does not connect them in any manner, and the same is true of the gospels.

The only other passage in the so-called "testimony" of Josephus is in *Life*, chap. 72, where he is giving an account of a



TEL HUM BEFORE THE RUINS WERE BURIED

skirmish between the troops under his command and the forces of Sylla. Josephus' horse fell and disabled its rider so that he had to be carried away, and he was taken "into a village called Cepharnome" (Κεφαρνωμη). Yet Capernaum was a city, a fact perfectly well known to Josephus and to all the people of the country; and, while a Greek or a Roman writer might use city and village interchangeably, this would be very strange in a Jewish writer. The first part of Capernaum of the gospels and of Josephus' Cepharnome may be accepted as identical—the Hebrew word for village, but is it possible to make *naum* and *nome* (ναυμ, νομη) identical? If a single letter were changed,

n for *k*, we should have a repetition of the preceding word for village, that is, there would be the Greek word for village appearing twice, and the Hebrew word for village between them.

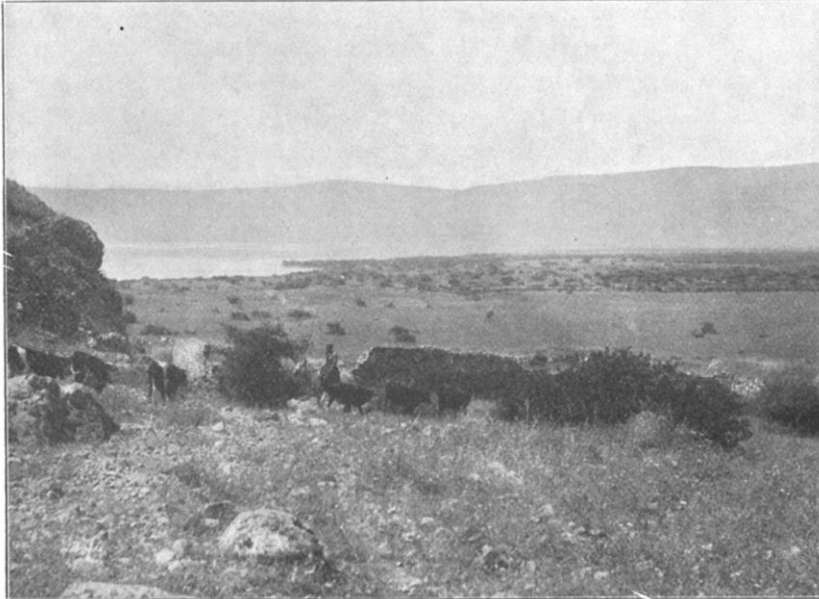
It seems as if we had reason for regarding the text here as corrupt. But even if correct it does not help us to find Capernaum, the apparent blunder of Josephus is unexplained, and the words remain a puzzle. Josephus' accident was on the east of the Jordan between Julias and the lake. He was carried to some village, and the following night was taken by boat to Tarichæa at the southern end of the lake. It is often maintained that Josephus, after his accident, "would be carried to the nearest place," *i. e.*, his Cepharnome would be near the mouth of the Jordan on the west side, since the enemy occupied the east side of the river; and, further, his Cepharnome would be Capernaum, the present *Tell Hûm*. It is a fact that the towns about the Sea of Galilee were at that time (during the war) divided politically; some had joined the Roman party, while others remained loyal to the Jews; hence it is pure assumption to say that Josephus would be carried to the nearest place; as a Jewish leader he certainly would not be taken where the inhabitants were favorable to the Romans.

In the middle of the plain of Gennesaret, a good mile back from the shore, is *Ain Mudawarah*, or Round Fountain, which has been suggested as the spring Capharnaum of Josephus; but years since the writer showed the impossibility of watering the plain from this source, and this theory is now generally abandoned. In our judgment it is almost certain that the copious fountain at *Ain Tabighah* is the "spring" referred to. But this fact affords no help to those who wish to locate Capernaum at Tell Hûm, for that place is distant two miles to the east, is separated from it by a formidable boulder bed, and the water of this spring was never led in that direction. The farther Tell Hûm is removed from the spring, the greater is the improbability of its representing Capernaum.

We have stated that the first part of the word Capernaum was the Hebrew word for village, now represented by *tell*. Some derive the last part of the name Tell Hûm from Nahum, a man's

name, but it seems far preferable to derive it from *tanhum*, and the meaning would be village of *comfort, consolation*. The Hebrew mind was fully equal to recognizing an analogy between such an idea and the life-giving water of the spring.

It is not possible to discuss the site of Capernaum without



KHAN MINYEH AND THE PLAIN OF GENNESARET

paying some attention to a neighboring city, Bethsaida, concerning which several theories have been advocated. It is a historical fact that during the first century of our era there was no place east of the Jordan known as Bethsaida, unless it might be some insignificant collection of huts, some "fish-house," *beth-saida*, for the temporary convenience of the fishermen of the lake. East of the Jordan, not far from the point where it enters the Sea of Galilee, there was a city called Julias, which Herod Philip II beautified and where he built a costly tomb for himself in which he was buried. The reader will readily place this man by remembering that he was the husband of Herodias and the father of Salome. The suggestion that Julias, which was

called Bethsaida or fish-house before our era, was a large place and situated partly on one side and partly on the other side of the river, has not even a shadow of an argument in its favor, and was at best a most unfortunate guess. Herod Antipas governed west of the Jordan, and Herod Philip II east of the Jordan; that river divided their dominions, and there was no overlapping of territory or of jurisdiction. The nature of the river, and especially the nature of the land on the west side, precludes the possibility of a double city. Those great beds of basalt bowlders have never been built upon by man. Moreover, the Bethsaida of the gospels was in Galilee, and this city was in close proximity to Capernaum and connected with it in many ways.

In Christ's words of doom upon the impenitent cities (he was to the south of them all when he spoke) the order in which they are mentioned must be noticed, followed by three of the gospels, namely, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. We place Chorazin at Kerazeh, two miles north of the lake, and we believe that Christ mentioned first the city that was most distant from him. Bethsaida, mentioned second, would be on the shore at Tell Hûm, and Capernaum, mentioned last, would be nearest the speaker, that is, at Khan Minyeh.

But what is to be done with the synagogue at Tell Hûm, of which there are extensive remains?¹ This fact is supposed to be a very strong argument in favor of its being Capernaum. In reply we say that possibly they do not mean so much as is sometimes thought, for each of the places mentioned was a "city," and, therefore, had its synagogue, so that the presence of such remains at one place has in reality no special weight. Moreover, as an archæologist, the writer does not consider that any remains of this kind now found in Galilee are as old as the time of Christ. After Jerusalem had been destroyed the second time in A. D. 134 or 136, the Jews were scattered, and considerably later in the second and third centuries they flocked to Galilee. Tiberias and the region about the Sea of Galilee became the center of Jewish learning; here were schools, learned men, and books. Judaism flourished here remarkably, forming one of the

¹ These ruins have recently been buried by the Franciscans who purchased the site.

brilliant periods of its history. The synagogues of Galilee, of which remains still exist, date, we think, from this period and not from the time of our Lord.

The incidents connected with the feeding of the five thousand have often been appealed to as furnishing evidence for the correct location of Bethsaida and Capernaum. The attempt to locate the scene of this miracle between Tiberias and Magdala has nothing whatever to support it. Scholars almost unanimously consider that this event took place on the eastern shore of the lake, at the south end of the plain of Batiha. This is the only point where there is a mountain near at hand to which Christ could have retired. Matthew says simply that the disciples went "over the sea to the other side;" Mark that they went "over the sea to the other side to Bethsaida." John says, "they went over the sea towards Capernaum" (Matt. 14; Mark 6; John 6). The storm came on, they fell slightly to the south of their course, and landed on the plain of Gennesaret.

We must keep in mind the relative position of these cities. Two places a mile apart (as to latitude) looked at from a distance of six miles will appear to be quite near each other and practically in the same direction. This is true of Tell Hûm and Khan Minyeh looked at from the scene of this miracle. The writer has tested this on the ground. From the point where the miracle occurred to sail towards Bethsaida or towards Capernaum would be to sail in the same direction. The discrepancy in the narratives, therefore, is perfectly natural and without a particle of weight. The remaining fact, however, that immediately after landing in Gennesaret Christ was in the synagogue at Capernaum preaching that wonderful discourse contained in the sixth chapter of John, seems to show that Capernaum was near at hand, *i. e.*, at the north end of the plain of Gennesaret, or Khan Minyeh. If Capernaum was at Tell Hûm, Christ must have gone past Bethsaida and three miles further towards the mouth of the Jordan in order to reach it.

The strongest arguments in favor of Khan Minyeh yet remain to be stated, and they are based on the fact that Capernaum had a customhouse (the particular tax referred to here was that

imposed upon merchandise and travelers) and a garrison. Where would these be located so as to accomplish their purpose best? One might say—and this argument has been used—that the customhouse was on the dividing line between the territory of Herod Antipas and that of Herod Philip II, and so would be near the mouth of the Jordan, that is, at Tell Hûm. But in reply we say, first, that Tell Hûm is two miles from the dividing line, *i. e.*, the Jordan, and, secondly, and conclusively, the taxing was wholly a Roman measure, very obnoxious to the Jews. Hence it had nothing to do with Antipas or Philip. The customhouse must accommodate both the sea traffic and the land traffic, and where would this point be? The great road from the south to Damascus passes the lake and touches it at the northwest corner, or at Khan Minyeh, and at no other point. Unless there are evident reasons for a change, we have a right to suppose, judging from oriental custom, that the present road follows the line of the ancient road. Tell Hûm was three miles away from this point, and what could have been the object in establishing a customhouse there? It was not on the highway where travelers and merchandise passed. We can think of nothing more unreasonable than to suppose that this great overland thoroughfare went three miles out of its course to accommodate a customhouse at Capernaum, or Tell Hûm. The customhouse would be brought to the road where road and lake touched each other. Moreover, Capernaum had a garrison, and the soldiers would be provided with permanent quarters of their own. At Tell Hûm there are no remains of a castle, but at Khan Minyeh we find such remains, to which we have already referred as an artificially shaped hill called *Khurbet el Oreimeh*. The road with its travel, the sea with its traffic, the garrison, and the customhouse had a natural connection, and the only natural place for them was at Khan Minyeh.

Thus far we find (1) that in locating Capernaum the testimony of Josephus affords very little help. (2) His spring must be placed at Et Tabighah, which militates against the claims of Tell Hûm. (3) In two important passages the gospels indicate that Capernaum should be at the north end of the plain of Gen-

nesaret. (4) The remains of a synagogue at Tell Hûm prove nothing, because each of the three cities had its synagogue, and at Chorazin such remains exist also. (5) We place Chorazin at Kerazeh; Bethsaida at Tell Hûm; and Capernaum at Khan Minyeh. (6) There the great caravan road between Damascus and



THE SEA OF GALILEE AND AIN EL TIN

Egypt touched the lake, and there are the remains of a castle which the garrison occupied. At two different times the writer had men dig on the plain just south of Khan Minyeh, and houses built of finely squared stones, streets, and other evidences were brought to light sufficient to justify the conclusion that an important town lies buried at that point. Here, in our judgment, Capernaum, Christ's "own city," stood. Its outlook south and east over the lake was charming. There stretched the fertile plain of Gennesaret. There rose as from the sea the beautiful buildings of Tiberias. Far down on the left was Gergesa; above it were the frowning walls of Gamala; and Gadara was plainly

visible on the heights far to the south. The fair waters of the Sea of Galilee were guarded on either hand by picturesque hills, and the overarching sky was glorious far beyond the painter's skill to reproduce.

If we could follow our Lord day after day during his residence in Capernaum, we should learn much of his manner of life, and likewise a great deal about the character of the people, their business, recreations, sorrows, struggles, everything that made up the sum of human experience on this busy shore.

Leaving Nazareth, Christ went down to Capernaum upon the seacoast and made it his permanent residence (Matt. 4 : 13). He was accompanied by "his mother, his brethren, and his disciples" (John 2 : 12). For some reason this place had special attractions for him, and he had already become familiar with it before he began his public ministry. Capernaum soon came to be spoken of as Christ's "own city" (Matt. 9 : 1), and when he was there people were accustomed to say that "he was at home" (Mark 2 : 1). He had grown up in a mountain city, and the contrast between its quiet life and the bustle, the scenery, and the climate of this charming lake made its due impression upon him. Three of the gospels mention the fact that he loved to walk upon its shores (Matt. 5 : 18; Mark 1 : 16; John 1 : 36); he met people of many classes; he conversed with them, noted their thoughts, observed their habits and characteristics, some of the people he invited to his home (John 1 : 39), and in these ways he found out the kind of men that he should need to call as his fellow-workers. If he seems to have read Nathanael's character by divine intuition (John 1 : 48), we may still reserve the right of thinking that he studied certain men and formed his judgment of their characters and fitness for his service before he called Andrew and his brother Simon, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and Philip and his friend Nathanael, or Bartholomew. There is significance in the fact that one pair of devoted friends and two pairs of brothers were the first selections of our Lord. Strong ties of kinship and friendship already existing were utilized by Christ in the new work which they were to share with him (Mark 1 : 16, 19, 20; John 1 : 41, 43, 48).

He had not chosen Capernaum as a residence that he might lead an inactive life. Not only was he conversant with fishermen, but he entered their boats that he might the more conveniently speak to those who gathered about him desiring to hear his message (Luke 5 : 3). He was more than a teacher ; a famous instructor or an eloquent orator may command our admiration and still their personality remain to us unattractive and cold. In the case of Christ at Capernaum everybody was drawn to him as a *helper*. Parents and children, the rich and poor, the sick and homeless ones, the ruler, the nobleman, the Roman officer, and the beggar felt that his hand, his touch, would bring relief to every phase of human need.

While at Nazareth we know that he was accustomed to attend the synagogue service regularly on the Sabbath and to take part in the same, and this habit he continued to observe in his new home in Capernaum. "On the Sabbath days" he was found in the synagogue teaching the people (Mark 1 : 21 ; Luke 5 : 31). Certainly there was something unusual in this man, for "his word was with power," and people were "astonished at his doctrine" (Luke 5 : 32).

His power of healing was early put, as from our human standpoint we should say, to the severest tests. In the synagogue where he was teaching there was a demoniac, a desperate case for the physicians. Luke said that he "had a spirit of an unclean devil" (4 : 33) which, at the Master's word, "came out of him" at once and left the afflicted one unharmed in body and in his right mind. Peter's anxiety for his mother-in-law, who was "sick of a fever," led him to seek the help of Christ. Jesus went with him to his house, touched the hand of the suffering woman, "and the fever left her" (Matt. 8 : 15). Very affecting is the story of the unknown woman, the victim of a chronic malady, who had exhausted all her resources upon physicians, but had not been healed ; who entered the crowd and said : "If I can but touch his clothes." Christ's brief commendation of her, "Thy faith hath made thee whole," has become one of the precious words of Christendom (Mark 5 : 25-34). How touching is the anxiety of the common people who are led to uncover the roof

that a poor paralytic might be let down immediately in the presence of the Healer (Mark 2: 1-8)!

Not only those in humble life, but persons of rank, "besought" his aid. We can almost hear the trembling voice as the nobleman pleads: "Come, . . . ere my child die." The merciful response was: "Thy son liveth" (John 4: 46-53). Moreover, a Roman officer, the commander of the garrison at Capernaum, has been led to believe that Christ can heal, and he intercedes with him in behalf of his beloved servant. This military leader was not pompous, proud, and disdainful, but a man of great humility and faith; in fact, Christ said that his faith excelled that of any of the sons of Israel (Matt. 8: 5-13). When Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, approached Christ and spoke of "his little daughter lying at the point of death," he appealed to one who had power to say to the lifeless body, when the young spirit had departed, "*Talithā Cūmi*," and to restore the precious life to its sorrowing parents (Mark 5: 22-24; 35-43).

It was at Capernaum that Christ showed his power over the many forms of disease prevalent at that time, reaching his hand even into the grave and leading forth again to life a beautiful child. It was there that he gave heart to his discouraged disciples by the miraculous draught of fishes (Luke 5: 6). It was near Capernaum that he walked on the water to succor them when in peril, speaking to them from the darkness and storm: "Be of good cheer, it is I; be not afraid" (Matt. 14: 27). One day he goes forth from Capernaum to meet the funeral procession at Nain in order to restore to a poor widow her only son (Luke 7: 11). Another day he crosses the sea that he may feed "five thousand men, besides women and children," who were hungry in a desert place (Matt. 14: 13-21). It was at Capernaum that his preparation was made for his only foreign missionary journey, that to Phœnicia, within the borders of Tyre and Sidon, which furnishes us with the picture of the Syro-Phœnician woman, beautiful so long after that nation and its glories have sunk into comparative oblivion. It was there that his preparations were made for his final journey to Jerusalem, when he was to exchange his home by the lovely and quiet sea

for the cross of a malefactor (Luke 9:51). It is impossible to rehearse even the recorded deeds of that active life at Capernaum. A miracle here, a sermon there, a secret prayer on yonder mountain, words of instruction, comfort, reproof, warn-



THE PROMONTORY AT KHAN MINYEH
Traditional Bethsaida in Foreground

ing, hope, spoken everywhere, hands, feet, and voice always busy in the way of blessing.

Yet this wonderful being, teacher, healer, friend, did not escape criticism. Great reforms then, as now, did not make rapid progress; not all the people of Capernaum were moved by this divine presence. "He ate with publicans and sinners" (Matt. 9:11); "he and his disciples ate with unwashed hands" (Matt. 15:2, 20); "they did not fast according to prescribed rules" (Matt 9:14); and with the Pharisees there was no pardon for such shocking breaches of propriety. Plucking and eating ears of corn in a field through which they passed on the Sabbath was a crime, and some of the Master's most precious words were pro-

nounced blasphemous (Mark 2 : 7). Christ was not indifferent to the various forms of opposition he met with, and he seems to have felt intense pain and sadness at the ingratitude, the stolid lack of appreciation, on the part of his enemies (Luke 10 : 12-15). From our point of view his life at Capernaum was a triumph. The very best results attended his labors ; many had been healed in body and mind ; many had been won to a better life ; and from these three cities there had been gathered about him many choice spirits, who struggled with him in his earthly conflicts and who were pledged to carry on his work after he should be called away.

In studying the topography of Galilee, the writer has often been led to reflect upon the reason why our Lord left Nazareth and took up his residence at Capernaum. This is a significant and far-reaching question, and it is found to be difficult to make people of the present day realize its importance. It is a fact that Capernaum, more than any other city of Palestine with the single exception of Jerusalem, was a center of commerce, travel, and especially of news. Roads led thence to Damascus and the Euphrates ; to the cities of the Mediterranean coast which were in touch with Europe ; to the southwest by Gaza, and thence to Egypt ; to the south along the great mountain range to Shechem, Jerusalem, and Hebron ; and to the Jordan valley and the rich and populous cities of Perea. Sailors, soldiers, merchants, travelers, princes, men of every class and from many parts of the world, passed through this place on business or pleasure. Hence it was inevitable that the fame of some wonderful healer, some teacher of unusual wisdom, should be carried thence with great rapidity, and in many directions. Christ's gospel was for all the world, and here were messengers from the East, the West, and the South, who would carry tidings of what they had seen to their distant homes. Had it been said that "Jesus shut himself up in a cloister," how different would have been the history of Christianity ; but since the new religion was for the homes, the hearts, and the lives of all men, we feel that we have revealed to us a part of God's plan when we read (Matt. 4 : 13) : "Leaving Nazareth . . . he dwelt at Capernaum."